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ABSTRACT

This paper offers some suggestions to college counselors which are pertinent for effecting change in self-concept of student clients. What the counselor is really attempting to do in the counseling relationship is to help the youthful client find a more constructive, less painful, and healthier way to go through the maturational process which can lead to positive and constructive change in self-concept. Perhaps this is the lesson that young people must eventually find out for themselves: that it is desirable to search for the truth, and there are no better ways than reality confrontation and hard work. (Author/PC)

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Counseling with College Youth -- from Apathy to Militancy

by

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As with so many youthful clients, we visualize a great part of our role as counselors as centering around changing their self-concept. This so often involves helping the client over a "discontinuity" or transition from one aspect of role function to another, where hopefully the client's self concept is changed from seeing himself in a non-performance role to seeing himself in a self-assured competent performance role. It seems that so many of our youth see themselves on the sideline and it is our task to help them see themselves as people who can and do perform. Some suggestions are offered as being pertinent for effecting the desirable change in self concept.

1. Listen and give attention and regard to the client as he struggles, no matter how disguised his problems, to get to his problems--to get them out--to express them. Are we aware that simply listening to a client's problems helps him to talk about them and to better handle them due to his possible change of evaluation of himself?

2. The most troublesome and feared problem is that which can't be talked about. Once a problem is talked about, however, usually it is likely to lose some of its fear element for the client.

3. If we can get the client to reach deeply into himself for the underlying reason or reasons for his behavior, we may then expect to have a real basis for a change in his self concept. If his behavior is motivated by his fear of being unpopular, and all too often he does not have a true picture of where he does or can stand with his peers, his fear of relating or interacting with other people also causes him to search for easy solutions that give him a temporary respite from human interaction.

4. We need to help the client see that many other young people struggle with similar problems, but they labor to overcome these problems without resorting to behavior that will be a hindrance to finding a solution to his problems. A number of clients often seem to save time by telling us that their problems are unique and are "bad"--"real bad", and not like anyone else's. If we can help him realize that others are like himself in their problems, this in itself will be a powerful force for a possible change in self concept.*

*One of our clients, after discussing point 4, offered the following:

Individuality and personal uniqueness are of primary importance to youth in general today. Being his own person with his own talents and thoughts and problems is the essential concern of the modern day rebel youth. It is possible that quite a few of your clients would rather approach their problems in an entirely personal and isolated manner, i.e. in viewing their own situation as unique and their problems as their own, to be treated that way and not like anyone else's. (Even though, in fact, they may share like problems with other youths.)

5. We must be constantly conscious of discovering his strengths and endeavor to build on these strengths. With most of our youthful clients we <u>can</u> find an area where he is competent. In a school or college setting, it is sometimes possible to have his friends come to recognize and value his particular skills. Group experiences can be extremely valuable in helping the client appraise himself more realistically and frequently "point up" hidden talents.

Once again, basic encounters, sensitivity groups, marathons and simple group counseling experiences are strongly recommended in helping the client see himself. It can also help him "break through" the dreaded alienation so many youth experience.

6. Is the client really seeing himself in realistic perspective--"seeing himself as others see him"? So often the college student appears to have a very warped view of how his peers really view him.

7. It appears quite often with young people that they do not accept themselves as they are, even though their rationalization is that it is the fault of others. We must help them accept themselves as they are, and if necessary, compensate for it.

8. It is important with the young client to recognize the moment of contact when it is appropriate to instill confidence through encouragement and the right moment when necessary to engage in confrontation as to his weaknesses or his use of drugs, for example. The choice of the right moment requires great care on the part of the counsel or because failure here may mean a continuous dependency on the drugs and a turn-off from counseling.

9. Confrontation as a therapeutic tool with the college client should be used sparingly in the counseling relationship, and only when the counselor is experienced and knowledgeable with regard to its possible or likely outcomes.

10. Confrontation is frequently interpreted by the client as a strong rejection and frequently causes either defensiveness or temporary compliance depending upon the status of the counselor, the dependency of the client, or the circumstances under which it is used.

11. Confrontation is likely to engender dependency in the client in view of its being an extremely strong lead, and the client is thus likely to look for other strong leads and direction on the part of the confronter.

12. Confrontation as a therapeutic modality, particularly in the hands of the novice, is more likely to be an expression of hostility rather than understanding, empathy or positive regard.

13. Confrontation is frequently justified by the counselor as being "open and congruent", but it may be an expression of rationalized aggression on the part of the confronter.

14. Confrontation is more likely to engender less insight on the part of the confrontee than more understanding leads--such as understanding remarks, interpretation, reflection, acceptance, etc.

In conclusion, what we are really attempting to do in our counseling relationship with the youthful client is to help him find a more constructive, less painful, and healthy way to go through the maturational process which can lead to positive and constructive change in self concept.

Finally, we must diligently try to communicate to youth that there are no simple answers to the perplexing problems facing us. If only a pill did exist that would answer all of our problems--but this thinking is fantasy. We solve our problems by facing them head-on, squarely and realistically, confronting one another with the real world, and not through a prism that distorts reality in the "eye of the beholder".

Perhaps this is the lesson that young people must eventually find out for themselves; that it is desirable to search for the truth, and there are no better ways than reality confrontation and hard work. The wishful thinking or magic formula panacea may temporarily cause one to focus less on the real world--but the problems do not go away, and in most cases, they reappear in more complex forms.